

3. (Canceled)
4. (Previously Presented) The water softening device of Claim 2, further comprising:

a non-regenerating polisher downstream of said water softeners with respect to the flow of raw water through said water softening device.
5. (Currently Amended) The water softening device of Claim ~~[[1]]~~ 2, wherein:

said water softeners are placed in a parallel arrangement with respect to the water flow.
6. (Previously Presented) The water softening device of Claim 5, wherein:

water flows alternately through said first water softener and said second water softener; and

said control device performs regeneration of one of said first water softener and said second water softener when the other of said first water softener and said second water softener has water flow therethrough.
7. (Currently Amended) The water softening device of Claim ~~[[1]]~~ 2, wherein:

said at least one regeneration chamber is common to said first water softener and said second water softener.
8. (Canceled)
9. (Previously Presented) A water softening method, the method comprising:

providing at least a first water softener and a second

water softener, each of the first and second water softeners having a

11. (Previously Presented) The water softening method of Claim 9, further comprising:
- treating water downstream of said water softeners with respect to flow of raw water through said water softeners with a non-regenerating polisher.
12. (Currently Amended) The water softening method of Claim [[8]] 9, wherein:
- said water softeners are placed in a parallel arrangement with respect to raw water flow.
13. (Previously Presented) The water softening method of Claim 12, wherein:
- water flows alternately through said water softeners;
- and
- said control device performs regeneration of one water softener when the other water softener has water flow therethrough.
14. (Currently Amended) The water softening method of Claim [[8]] 9, wherein:
- said at least one regeneration chamber is common to said first water softener and said second water softener.
15. (Canceled)
16. (Currently Amended) The water softening device of Claim [[15]] 17, wherein:
- said at least one regeneration chamber is common to said first water softener and said second water softener.
17. (Currently Amended) A water softening device, comprising:
- at least a first water softener and a second water

19. (Previously Presented) The water softening device of Claim 17, further comprising:
a non-regenerating polisher downstream of said water softeners with respect to the flow of raw water through said water softening device.
20. (Canceled)
21. (Previously Presented) The water softening device of Claim 4, wherein said non-regenerating polisher contains a Na⁺ type ion exchange resin.
22. (Canceled)
23. (Previously Presented) The water softening method of Claim 11, wherein said non-regenerating polisher contains a Na⁺ type ion exchange resin.
24. (Currently Amended) A water softening device as described in Claim [[1]] 2, wherein the hardness detection device includes:
a chamber for collecting the sample of treated water via the sample conduit;
a hardness component measuring device in fluid communication with the chamber via a connector conduit; and
a pump associated with the connector conduit for delivering the sample of treated water to the measuring device at a constant pressure and constant flow.
25. (Previously Presented) A water softening device as described in Claim 24, further including:
means for maintaining the sample of treated water at a constant temperature.

26. (Previously Presented) A water softening device as described in Claim 25, wherein the means comprises a heat exchanger associated with the connector conduit and disposed upstream of the measuring device.
27. (Currently Amended) The water softening method of Claim [[8]] 9, further including the steps of:
- directing the sample of treated water through the sample conduit to a chamber for collection thereof;
 - linking the chamber to a hardness component device via a connector conduit; and
 - providing a pump that is associated with the connector conduit for delivering the sample of treated water to the measuring device at a constant pressure and constant flow.
28. (Previously Presented) The water softening method of Claim 27, further including the step of:
- maintaining the sample of treated water at a constant temperature.
29. (Previously Presented) The water softening method of Claim 28, wherein the step of maintaining the sample of treated water at a constant temperature comprises the step of:
- disposing a heat exchanger along the connector conduit upstream of the measuring device and operating the heat exchanger so as to maintain the constant temperature.